

Outcome Thinking: Glossary

Activities – Methods, techniques or strategies employed in carrying out a program.

Indicators – Observable and measurable evidence that the intended outcomes are being achieved; must be specific and able to be seen, heard or demonstrated.

Inputs – Resources needed to carry out a program’s activities; may include staff and volunteers, time/hours devoted to planning and implementing program activities, money, facilities, even the program participants.

Logic model – A conceptual framework that links a program’s inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes to the desired end goal (or result) that an organization works to achieve in its community; provides a foundation for identifying key program elements as a basis for program assessment.

Outcome – The change in a program’s participants, or its community’s conditions, that is anticipated as a result of program activities; might include a change in knowledge, attitude, behavior, skills, or condition. Outcomes may be short-term or immediate (the direct result of program activities), or may be intermediate (achieved as a result of other short-term outcomes).

Outcome map – A visual representation of the assumptions inherent in a program’s theory of change, presenting the connections between a program’s activities and its short-term outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and the end goal (or result) that the organization seeks to achieve in its community.

Outcome thinking – A mindset or orientation that is focused on measuring the changes or impact that programs have on clients, rather than measuring or counting the services provided by the agency.

Outputs – Units of service, counts of activities, and/or products that a program delivers, and which are intended to lead to desired outcomes (e.g., number of brochures distributed or hours of tutoring provided).

Program assessment – A process by which a systematic examination of an agency’s program is conducted in order to answer questions about effectiveness and/or efficiency.

Results – End goal(s) that an agency strives to achieve in its community; these are often greater than what a single program can achieve, but a useful point of reference to guide program planning and evaluation.

Theory of change – Articulation of an organization’s assumptions about how its program activities will ultimately contribute to the long-term change (or results) it strives to achieve in the community at large. A theory of change can often best be defined by following a sequence of “so that...” explanations that connect activities to short-term outcomes, to intermediate and longer-term outcomes, to the desired end goal for the community.

Outcome Thinking: Resources

Publications

The Web sites noted as a means to order publications are also very informative and sources of further guidance or resources.

Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach (United Way of America, 1996) – Provides a comprehensive and user-friendly guide to tackling outcome measurement, with a more in-depth look at the concepts and frameworks of logic modeling, indicators and data collection. Includes guidance for how to assemble and organize people to undertake program assessment. Order by phone from Sales Service/America at 800-772-0008.

Outcomes for Success! (The Evaluation Forum, 2000) – A very solid guide and workbook for developing a theory of change and logic model. Includes exercises, many examples, and in-depth guidance for learning and understanding the concepts and applying them to any organization. Order by phone (206-269-0717) or online at www.evaluationforum.com.

Outcome Frameworks (The Rensselaerville Institute, 2004) – A theoretical overview of how outcomes measurement for not-for-profits has developed, along with many of the major frameworks that have been developed for program assessment/evaluation. Good for background information to stimulate ideas for additional ways to assess programs. Order by phone (518-797-3783) or online at: www.RInstitute.org.

Additional Web sites

The Evaluation Toolkit (W.K.Kellogg Foundation) – A wealth of resource materials on logic models and program evaluation, with downloadable handbooks in both English and Spanish. Includes guidance on how to develop an evaluation plan (next-level work for organizations pursuing this in a substantive way), as well as links to other resources that provide live examples of theories of change and logic models.
<http://www.wkkf.org/Programming/Overview.aspx?CID=281>

Outcome Measurement Resource Network (United Way of America) – Background information generated in the United Way's efforts to foster outcome measurements, and a large set of downloadable resources – articles, samples, guides, videos – to guide organizations undertaking outcome measurement.
<http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/>

This material was developed by Community Resource Exchange (CRE), a not-for-profit consulting group that provides strategic advice and technical services every year to over 350 community-based organizations that fight poverty and HIV/AIDS. For over 25 years, CRE has been committed to providing these front-line community groups with the information, skills and leadership training to leverage their resources within their organization and communities.